

Top

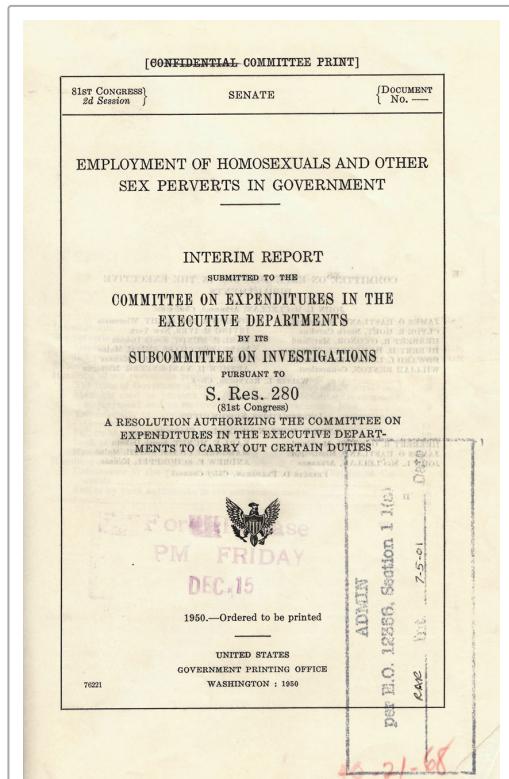


“These People Are Frightened to Death”

Congressional Investigations and the Lavender Scare

Summer 2016, Vol. 48, No. 2

By Judith Adkins



On December 15, 1950, the Hoey committee released this report, concluding that homosexuals were unsuitable for employment in the Federal Government and constituted security risks in positions of public trust. (Records of the U.S. Senate, RG 46)

The Red Scare, the congressional witch-hunt against Communists during the early years of the Cold War, is a well-known chapter of American history. A second scare of the same era has been much slower to make its way into public consciousness, even though it lasted far longer and directly impacted many more lives.

Beginning in the late 1940s and continuing through the 1960s, thousands of gay employees were fired or forced to resign from the federal workforce because of their sexuality. Dubbed the Lavender Scare, this wave of repression was also bound up with anti-Communism and fueled by the power of congressional investigation.

The purge followed an era in which gay people were increasingly finding each other and forming communities in urban America. During World War II, many men and women left behind the restrictions of rural or small-town life for the first time. After the war, young people poured into cities, where density and anonymity made pursuit of same-sex relationships more possible than ever.

By the late 1940s, even the general public was becoming more aware of homosexuality. Alfred Kinsey's *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*, published in 1948,

became a bestseller and drew attention for its claim that same-sex experiences were relatively common.

This publicity did not, however, make homosexuality more acceptable, in part because virtually no gay people were open about their sexuality. Also, the country was in the midst of a more general sex-crime panic, stirred up by a few highly publicized cases. In this context, greater public awareness of homosexuality coincided with growing unease and, in many parts of the country, an increase in official repression. Certainly this was true in Washington, D.C.

In 1947 the U.S. Park Police initiated in the city a "Sex Perversion Elimination Program," targeting gay men for arrest and intimidation. A year later, Congress passed an act "for the treatment of sexual psychopaths" in the nation's capital. That law facilitated the arrest and punishment of people who acted on same-sex desire and also labeled them mentally ill. Homosexuality was perceived as a lurking subversive threat at a time when the country was coping with tremendous social change as well as rising anxiety about another lurking subversive threat: Communism.

Enter Senator Joseph McCarthy, whose rhetoric explicitly associated Communists and gay people, turning the slow burn of repression into a firestorm. On February 9, 1950, McCarthy delivered his now-famous speech in which he claimed to have a list of 205 known Communists working at the State Department.

On February 20, McCarthy spoke at length on the Senate floor, offering more specifics about some of these individuals, this time characterizing them more broadly as "unsafe risks." Two cases concerned homosexuality.

"Case 14" was, according to McCarthy, a known homosexual who had been ousted by the State Department but then rehired. In his discussion of that man and of "Case 62," McCarthy directly linked homosexuality and Communism. A top intelligence official had reportedly told him that "practically every active Communist is twisted mentally or physically in some way." McCarthy implied that the men in these two cases were susceptible to Communist recruitment because as homosexuals they had what he called "peculiar mental twists."

Just over a week later, Deputy Undersecretary of State John Peurifoy, testifying before a subcommittee of the Senate Committee on Appropriations, revealed that the State Department had ousted 91 homosexual employees as security risks.

Learn more about:

- LGBT-related records at the National Archives on the Tumblr blog "Discovering LGBTQ History".
- Records in the Eisenhower Library about federal employment policy toward gay and lesbian workers.
- The "Records of Rights" exhibit at the National Archives.

This was not a complete surprise to the Senate. In 1946, its Appropriations Committee had expressed concern about security risks in the State Department and even attached to that year's appropriations bill a rider giving the secretary of state broad discretion to dismiss employees for the sake of national security. In response, the State Department had put in place more stringent security checks and begun rooting out homosexuals. This purge, specific to State, had been proceeding with relatively little publicity.

However, Peurifoy's statement about the 91, coming as it did right after McCarthy's two speeches, sparked a press frenzy and public outcry.

Political rhetoric increasingly linked "Communists and queers." Many assumptions about Communists mirrored common beliefs about homosexuals. Both were thought to be morally weak or psychologically disturbed, both were seen as godless, both purportedly undermined the traditional family, both were assumed to recruit, and both were shadowy figures with a secret subculture.

Unlike Communists, however, homosexuals were being uncovered—a fact that encouraged further pursuit.

Shortly after Peurifoy's revelation about the 91, a subcommittee of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee looked into McCarthy's charges about Communists in the State Department. Known as the Tydings committee after its chair, Senator Millard Tydings, this committee focused on *loyalty* risks rather than the broader category of *security* risks, largely skirting the issue of homosexuality.

Disputes broke out over this scope. Critics deemed the committee's narrow inquiry a whitewash orchestrated to shield President Harry Truman's administration from criticism about subversives in government.

Some members of Congress—driven by partisanship, political opportunism, concern about national security, alarm over "perversion," general suspicion towards the federal bureaucracy, or some combination of factors—pressed for further action. Two congressional investigations into homosexuality in the federal workforce followed.

A Committee of Two: The Wherry-Hill Investigation

From late March to May of 1950, Senator Kenneth Wherry, a Republican, and Senator J. Lister Hill, a Democrat, undertook the first investigation. The two men alone made up a subcommittee of the Subcommittee on Appropriations for the District of Columbia. No records from this investigation survive, beyond press coverage and two published reports, one from Hill and a longer one from Wherry.

The senators heard testimony from Lt. Roy Blick, head of the D.C. Metropolitan Police Department's vice squad. Blick claimed that 5,000 homosexuals lived in D.C. and that about 3,700 of them were federal employees. These figures were highly speculative but dramatic and widely reported by the press.

Wherry and Hill also questioned government officials, including representatives from the State Department, the Defense Department, military intelligence, and the Civil Service Commission, the agency that oversaw civilian employees of the federal government.

In particular, Wherry wanted to know whether any of the "91 moral weaklings" fired from State had made their way back into government service. The CSC looked into the matter, determined that 13 had indeed been rehired, and outlined the steps it was taking to remove them. Wherry concluded that no coordinated system existed to guarantee that the files of personnel separated for homosexuality were appropriately flagged.

Commissioner Harry Mitchell of the CSC sent the committee suggestions for a "routine procedure to rid the offices of Government of moral perverts and guard against their admission." Henceforth, arresting authorities would report the real nature of each arrest to the Federal Bureau of Investigation, which would alert the CSC, which would in turn take appropriate action to pursue removal.

To remedy the rehiring problem, the commission was also distributing to all federal departments and agencies a letter emphasizing the necessity of reporting promptly "the actual reasons" for all separations or resignations.

The CSC was not alone in springing into action once Congress took an interest in the issue. "Since your subcommittee . . . began their investigation," Wherry boasted in his report, "there has been increased activity on the part of Government departments and agencies . . . to take off their payrolls alleged moral perverts." Lieutenant Blick asserted that the congressional investigation had prompted nearly every agency of the government to send an official to see him.

"From what I can learn and by my own personal observation," Blick claimed, "between 90 and 100 moral perverts have recently resigned." If such a small-scale congressional inquiry had prompted the agencies to root out 100, Wherry reasoned, an extensive investigation would accomplish even more and was clearly in the public interest.

Wherry also emphasized the Communist connection: "Only the most naïve could believe that the Communists' fifth column in the United States would neglect to propagate and use homosexuals to gain their treacherous ends." Indeed, one special investigator told the committee that many homosexuals could be spotted at the Communist meetings routinely monitored by D.C. police.



Senators Kenneth Wherry (pictured at left) and J. Lister Hill conducted the first congressional investigation into homosexuality in the federal workforce. (U.S. Senate Historical Office)

The Senate was convinced. In response to Wherry and Hill's recommendations, it resolved on June 7, 1950, to undertake a thorough, comprehensive investigation of "the alleged employment by the departments and agencies of the Government of homosexuals and other moral perverts."

A Wider Net: The Hoey Committee Investigation

This second, larger investigation was assigned to the investigations subcommittee of the Senate's Committee on Expenditures in the Executive Departments. Also known as the Hoey committee after its chairman, Senator Clyde Hoey, the subcommittee included three additional Democrats (Senators James Eastland, John McClellan, and Herbert O'Conor) and three Republicans (Senators Karl Mundt, Andrew Schoepel, and Margaret Chase Smith).

Senator McCarthy was also on the subcommittee but excluded himself from this particular investigation, resigning his seat temporarily on June 14. He still occasionally forwarded information about suspected homosexuals and likely had the ear of the subcommittee's chief counsel, Francis Flanagan. (In an interview conducted in 1996, Flanagan described himself as a "close personal friend" of McCarthy's and recalled extended hunting trips the two men took together.) In addition to Flanagan, the committee staff included an assistant counsel, five investigators, and a chief clerk.



Senators Herbert O Connor, Clyde Hoey, and Margaret Chase Smith in 1949, the year before all three served on the committee conducting a comprehensive investigation into the alleged employment of gay people by the federal government. (U.S. Senate Historical Office)

That team gathered information from federal agencies, law enforcement, judicial authorities, and the medical community. In July and September, the committee also held five days of "executive session" hearings, closed to the public, at which a subset of these officials and authorities testified before the committee's members and staff. No gay men or lesbians spoke.

Ruth Young, the committee's chief clerk, suggested in an oral history years later that the presence of Senator Smith, the only woman in the Senate, constrained discussion. "You could have been talking about the weather," Young recollected. "You never heard a bunch of hearings with so little sex." (Indeed, Flanagan later recalled Senator Hoey asking him to advise Smith to skip the hearings. She insisted on attending. Hoey complained that he had wanted to ask more questions but could not do so with her there.)

The documents gathered and generated by the Hoey committee during its six months in operation are held at the Center for Legislative Archives, the permanent

home within the National Archives for the records of Congress. These documents illuminate the committee's work processes and many details of this particular chapter of history.

Memoranda and index cards in the records show the committee's initial intent to create a central name index of known or suspected homosexuals. However, President Truman had previously issued a directive closing government personnel files to congressional committees, and the Hoey committee quickly refocused its efforts.

The staff first contacted a wide range of federal agencies to ascertain the number of suspected homosexuals investigated or removed from employment and to inquire about the agency's related policies and procedures and its general stance on the suitability of gay employees. A questionnaire went out to all branches of the military plus 53 civilian departments and agencies, ranging from the large and prominent, like State, Treasury, and Justice, to the small and obscure, like the American Battle Monument Commission and the Philippine War Damage Commission. Committee investigators then interviewed agency officials and summarized these conversations in memoranda.

Most agencies came out strongly against the suitability of homosexual employees. The response of Secretary of Commerce Charles Sawyer was typical. In a July 24 letter to the committee, he declared:

"The privilege of working for the United States Government should not be extended to persons of dubious moral character, such as homosexuals or sex perverts. The confidence of our citizenry in their Government would be severely taxed if we looked with tolerance upon the employment of such persons."

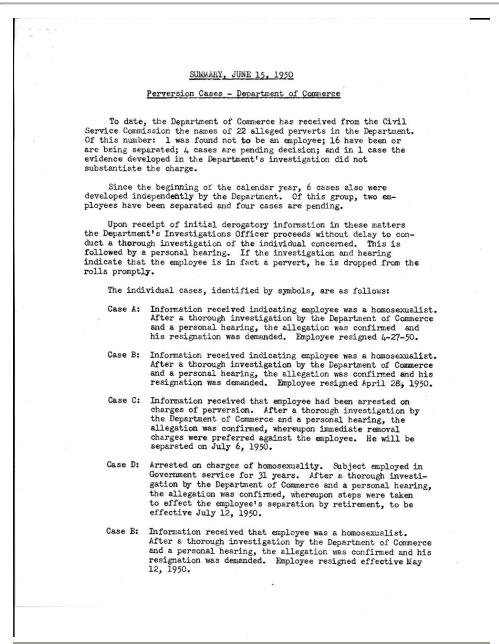
Not all agency officials were equally damning, however.

For example, in his July 31 reply to the committee, Howard Colvin, acting director of the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service, asserted that homosexuals could make good employees:

"Since it is possible, according to our understanding of medical and psychiatric opinion on the subject, for a homosexual to lead a normal, well-adjusted life, we do not consider that such a person necessarily constitutes a bad security risk. We believe that each such case would have to be decided on its own merits."

Certain agencies may have been more concerned about homosexuality, and others more inclined to turn a blind eye. It is impossible to know whether the subtle distinctions in these letters reflect the particular agency's culture, the attitude of the individual writing the response, or some combination of factors, but there is at least evidence here of a range of opinion.

The Hoey committee records also show that a small number of agency officials were initially not entirely forthcoming. Investigator James Thomas grew exasperated with John Shover, director of personnel at the National Labor Relations Board. "His attitude at the time," Thomas writes in a July 20 memorandum summarizing a telephone interview, "did not appear to be too cooperative." When Thomas proposed an in-person meeting to discuss two cases of



An excerpt from the Commerce Department's response to the Hoey committee. Many employees confronted with charges of homosexuality chose to resign. (Records of the U.S. Senate, RG 46)

homosexuality in the department, Shover balked. According to Thomas, "he more or less refused to receive me for this purpose and said rather bluntly: 'I am not going to let you see any of our files.'" This occasional resistance and the subtle variations of opinion evident in the committee's records suggest that, at least at the start of the scare, each agency may have had its own nuanced stance toward homosexuality.

At the committee's formal hearings, the intelligence community was especially well-represented. The senators seemed particularly eager for advice from that sector. Senator McClellan asked Adm. Roscoe Hillenkoetter, director of the Central Intelligence Agency, for input into possible legislation to establish a master database of identified homosexuals. Senator Smith invited the admiral to think about whether "a special agency" should be created to deal with the problem. Senator Mundt praised him for making it clear "why it is dangerous to put a homosexual in an

unimportant, non-sensitive position." Mundt summed up his new understanding:

"This clandestine comraderie [sic] they establish necessarily brings to Government people of homosexual tendencies. Even though you hire him as a janitor, he tends to bring in a fellow who might become chief of the division."

The committee also gathered data from law enforcement and judicial authorities. The D.C. Metropolitan Police Department shared its arrest records related to homosexuality. The U.S. Park Police provided its "Pervert Records" in two separate documents, one for government employees and the other for everybody else.

Officials of both forces testified about the challenges of policing homosexuality in the capital city. Lieutenant Blick rued the difficulty of eliminating cruising from the public parks—especially the restrooms: "We have been out there, Mr. Chairman, from 4:30 p.m. on around until 4:30 or 5:00 a.m. in the morning, and . . . I do not believe a half a dozen legitimate persons go in there to answer Nature's call."

In addition, the committee took testimony from D.C. judges and prosecutors. Much of the conversation centered on the inadequacies of the forfeiture system. Men arrested for seeking same-sex contact were typically charged with disorderly conduct and allowed to forfeit a \$25 collateral without appearing in court.

To survey how these offenses were being handled elsewhere, the Hoey committee sent questionnaires to police and prosecutors in 10 of the nation's largest cities. It also held conferences with police officials in Baltimore, New York City, and Philadelphia.

Finally, the committee investigated what it called the "medical aspects" of the problem. Staff investigators wrote to and interviewed prominent psychiatrists and other medical authorities to ascertain whether homosexuals could be detected through psychiatric examination, whether and how they could be cured, whether they lacked the emotional stability necessary for government service, whether they tended to seduce younger men and women, and whether it would be helpful to have psychiatrists on personnel boards charged with identifying homosexuals. Committee staff consulted close to two dozen medical authorities and devoted one session of hearings to related testimony.

The doctors' letters and testimony offer a snapshot of the medical community's understanding of homosexuality at the time. Dr. Clements Fry of Yale University's Division of Psychiatry and Mental Hygiene captured the overall tenor in his August 9 letter:

"It is a difficult task to answer your five questions as the problem of homosexuality is more involved than your questions indicate. Each question would have to be answered with qualifications for homosexuality is not an entity. There are all shades and gradations."

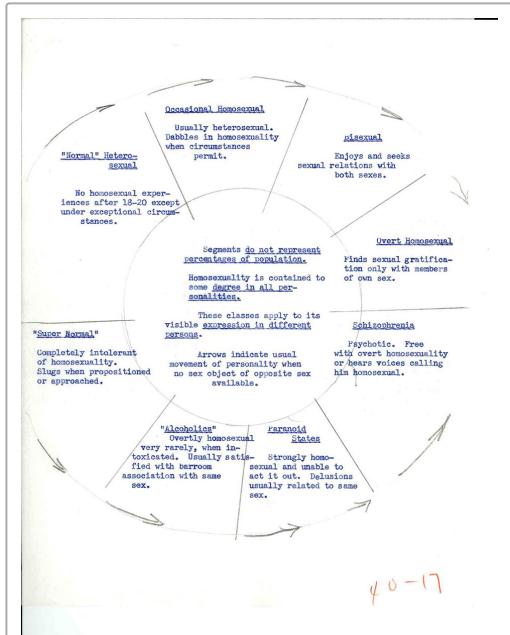
Other medical authorities echoed his points about the complexity of the issue, the coexistence of various tendencies in the same person, and the fluidity of sexuality. In his July 26 testimony before the committee, Dr. Leonard Scheele, Surgeon General of the U.S. Public Health Service, observed, "We have many individuals who are not completely homosexual. We have some who are homo and heterosexual at various times." He underscored the sketchiness of knowledge about the issue: "We are dealing in a gap area in large degree."

The committee, it seemed, hoped instead for clarity, simplicity, and straightforward solutions. Senator Smith asked Dr. Scheele, "There is no quick test like an x-ray that discloses these things?"

"No, unfortunately," he replied, "it is a long interview affair."

Another witness before the committee, Capt. George Raines, professor of psychiatry at Georgetown University, emphasized the role his social connections played in his understanding. Having known a thousand well-adjusted gay men and lesbians, he declared that "the homosexual in the drawing room is quite a different individual than the homosexual the psychiatrist sees in his office. Only sick people go to a doctor." His experience foreshadowed what came to pass in a larger way by the end of the 20th century, as widespread social interaction with openly gay people increased public acceptance of homosexuality.

That future, however, was a long way off. In 1952, the American Psychiatric Association's first *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* officially classified homosexuality as a "sociopathic personality disturbance." Ironically, the relatively open-minded Raines was then



When Capt. George Raines testified before the committee, he submitted this diagram, which he had used to teach his psychiatry students at Georgetown University. Raines believed that homosexuality was contained to some degree in all personalities. (Records of the U.S. Senate, RG 46)

the chairman of the APA's Committee on Nomenclature and Statistics, which shepherded the manual into existence.

The fine print in that text admits that people placed in this category were "ill primarily in terms of society and of conformity with the prevailing cultural milieu," but that hedging did not soften the blow on gay men and lesbians. That official "sociopathic" designation carried tremendous force, lasting for more than 20 years and justifying widespread discrimination. Nevertheless, the Hoey committee's files show that, even in this era, some in the medical community were trying, however haltingly and inconsistently, to articulate an understanding of human sexuality that embraced complexity.

Tightening the Net

The two congressional investigations themselves, and the procedural and other changes put in place while they were ongoing, made life far more precarious for gay federal workers.

In her testimony before the Hoey committee on September 8, Frances Perkins, former secretary of labor and then a member of the Civil Service Commission, emphasized recent initiatives aimed at eliciting from all government offices "the true reasons" for resignations. Perkins reported that the commission had established an inspection division—a "constant inspection service"—charged with ensuring agency compliance with the new full disclosure rules.

"I think we can say," asserted Perkins, "that because of recent pressures which we and others have imposed upon the agencies, and a new awareness of the fact that this problem existed, that we are now getting we believe the full cause of the resignation." It was becoming increasingly difficult for a gay worker to resign without a permanent tag of "perversion" or "homosexuality" on his or her record.

During the same hearing, D. Milton Ladd, the assistant to the director of the FBI, reported that the bureau had recently delivered Lieutenant Blick's list of D.C. homosexuals to the Civil Service Commission and to all relevant government agencies. On top of that, the FBI had instructed the D.C. Metropolitan Police, as well as the police departments of neighboring cities in Maryland and Virginia, to indicate on all arrest records submitted to the FBI in the future "information as to the man's employment, particularly where there is indication he is employed by the Federal Government." In May, reported Ladd, the FBI had taken one additional giant step, instructing police departments throughout the U.S. "to indicate on any arrest fingerprint cards, the federal

employment of the individuals arrested." A man could be picked up in California for responding to an undercover vice officer's suggestive remarks—and end up losing his government job 2,000 miles away in Washington, D.C.

The Hoey committee also directly influenced District of Columbia court procedures and penalties for cases involving homosexuality. According to Thomas Quinn, associate judge of the municipal court, the Hoey committee's Flanagan met in early August with George Barse, chief judge of the municipal court, "with regard to homosexual cases, and with particular regard to the matter of forfeitures."

This meeting sparked a conference of all the city judges later in the month, resulting in a new judicial order. That order prohibited forfeiture in disorderly conduct cases of a sexual nature and required that \$300 cash or \$500 bond be posted. "So by that procedure," Quinn observed, "we will force these individuals to come into court and they will either have to stand trial or enter a plea." These changes ratcheted up the financial penalty, as well as the public shaming, and all because Flanagan had taken action.

Without a doubt, particular individuals were detected and removed from employment as a direct result of the two congressional investigations. In addition to Blick's claim in May that close to 100 had been rooted out just since the Wherry-Hill investigation began in March, the files of the Hoey committee show that certain individuals were caught up in its wider net as well. Anonymous correspondents submitted the names of suspected homosexuals to the committee. Staff of the committee also cross-referenced information to snare individuals who had until then managed to fly under the radar.

For example, investigator James Thomas wrote a memorandum on July 6, summarizing his interview with officials at the General Accounting Office about 10 homosexuality cases. Then he looked through the Hoey committee's file of police records and found the names of two additional GAO employees who had been arrested for same-sex activity. Thomas notified the agency, adding in a postscript to his memo, "The G.A.O. had no record of the charges in these cases and were glad to receive the information concerning them."

ao 18	2211
1	Senator Smith. It seems to me that 105 is a very large
2	number for the number of employees in the State Department
3	service, and I am wondering how there could be so many if the
4	usual investigation is made of every employee before they are
5	taken on.
6	Mr. Humelsine. Of course, Senator, that is over a three-
7	year period, in fact, going into the fourth year.
8	Senator Smith. Is not that quite a good number?
9	Mr. Humelsine. I do not believe so. I believe if you
10	would take it against any statistics that you can get or
11	"guesstimate" on this as far as, say, the national average is
12	concerned, I think you would find it pretty low.
13	Senator Smith. I wonder if your investigation should be
14	tighter.
15	Mr. Humelsine. In our investigations now we make a very
16	careful investigation from this standpoint. We have changed
17	our investigating techniques considerably because of the re-
18	cognition of this problem.
19	To give you an example of that -- we are very careful now
20	and alert to things that at one time were meaningless to us
21	from the standpoint of investigation. If an individual would
22	say, "Well, this is a very fine person but they seem to have
23	prissy habits." -- Well, there are certain statements like
24	that that individuals you are interviewing will not face up to
25	directly, but they will give a hint as to it. Well, our people

Carlisle Humelsine, the State Department's acting deputy under secretary of state for administration, testified before the Hoey committee in closed session on July 19, 1951. This exchange between Humelsine and Senator Margaret Chase Smith indicates that State had recently ratcheted up its scrutiny of employees, especially those who were unmarried or had "prissy habits." (Records of the U.S. Senate, RG 46)

It came to the committee's attention that Congress itself had no system for dealing with "perversion" in its midst. Senator Hoey acknowledged the oversight in a November 28 memorandum to the Justice Department's deputy attorney general, Peyton Ford:

"Our investigation revealed that no procedures now exist whereby the proper officials in the legislative branch of the government can be kept informed in those cases in which legislative employees may be arrested . . . on charges of homosexuality."

His letter was likely sparked by the discovery, mentioned in a letter of the same date by Flanagan, that a current employee of the House had been arrested the preceding March for homosexual activity. Each chamber had a problem. Committee clerk Ruth Young recalled that an elevator operator in the Senate was found to be on "the District of Columbia list of known homosexuals." In his November 30 reply to Hoey, Ford concurred with the chairman's suggestion that, henceforth, FBI information about any House or Senate employee arrested on charges of homosexuality should be forwarded to the chair of that chamber's committee on administration.

The two congressional investigations had a chilling effect on the overall climate of Washington's gay community.

"I think you should know," Captain Raines observed in his testimony before the Hoey committee, "those of us in town who have a large number of contacts are aware . . . that Government at this time has a rising wave of anxiety in it, a tremendous wave of anxiety. These people are frightened to death, and the agencies, some of them are frightened."

The Power of a Report

After completing its investigation, the Hoey committee issued a report, *Employment of Homosexuals and Other Sex Perverts in Government*, summarizing its findings and recommendations. The committee found that, during the preceding three years, close to 5,000 homosexuals had been detected in the military and civilian workforces.

EMPLOYMENT OF HOMOSEXUALS IN GOVERNMENT 19

Municipal court in the District of Columbia. Since October the judges of that court, on the 2nd and on August 18, 1950, issued an order to the prosecutors and law enforcement officials of the District of Columbia which provided that all persons charged with sex offenses within the District of Columbia should post a minimum collateral of \$500 bond or \$300 cash and that the form of collateral should be made at the time of prosecution or conviction of the offense. This order, which became effective on August 21, 1950, had the immediate effect of correcting the previous deficiencies in the handling of forfeitures in sex cases. If the proposed statutory changes are made in the District of Columbia Criminal Code, it is believed that the laws and prosecutive and judicial procedures in sex cases in the District will be entirely adequate.

The Superintendent of Police in the District of Columbia has informed the subcommittee that additional men have now been assigned to the detective squad which handles homosexual and similar cases, and further additional men will be added to that squad in the near future as soon as qualified officers are available. The subcommittee believes that this added emphasis on the law enforcement aspect of the problem, together with the proposed changes in existing laws, will be most helpful in controlling sex perversion in the District of Columbia.

CONCLUSION

There is no place in the United States Government for persons who violate the laws or the accepted standards of morality, or who otherwise bring discredit upon the Government through acts of scandalous personal conduct. Such persons are not suitable for Government positions and in the case of doubt the American people are entitled to have errors of judgment on the part of their officials, if there must be errors, resolved on the side of caution. It is the opinion of this subcommittee that those who engage in acts of homosexuality and other perversional sex acts are not suitable employees in the Federal Government. This conclusion is based upon the fact that persons who indulge in such degraded activity are committing not only illegal and immoral acts, but they also constitute security risks in positions of public trust.

The subcommittee found that in the past many Government officials failed to take a realistic view of the problem of sex perversion in Government with the result that a number of sex perverts were not discovered or removed from Government jobs, and in still other instances they were quietly eased out of one department and promptly found employment in another agency. This situation undoubtedly stemmed from the fact that there was a general disqualification of one part of many Government officials to face squarely the problem of sex perversion among Federal employees and as a result they did not take the proper steps to solve the problem. The rules of the Civil Service Commission and the regulations of the agencies themselves prohibit the employment of sex perverts and these rules have been in effect for many years. Had the existing rules and regulations been in effect for many months, the number of perverts who were forced out of Government in recent months would have been long since removed from the Federal service.

It is quite apparent that as a direct result of this investigation officials throughout the Government have become much more alert to the

An excerpt from the Hoey committee's final report, which served as the foundation for the federal government's exclusion of gay people for years to come. (Records of the U.S. Senate, RG 46)

Written by Flanagan and approved by the committee, the report concluded that gay people should not be employed by the federal government because they were "generally unsuitable" and constituted "security risks." Much was made of their supposed vulnerability to blackmail, though evidence of this was lacking. The report asserted also that gay people lacked emotional stability, had weak "moral fiber," were a bad influence on the young, and attracted others of their kind to government service. "One homosexual," the report warned, "can pollute a Government office."

Flanagan selectively used evidence that the committee had gathered, largely ignoring, for example, the complexities raised by medical authorities. The report also dismissed the hesitations, qualifying statements, and more tolerant attitudes voiced by a minority of agency officials.

Flanagan characterized these alternative perspectives as "unrealistic" views of the problem, as relying on the "false premise" that what employees did in their own time was their own business, and as "a head-in-the-sand attitude."

While the report did not call for any major new legislation, it urged government agencies and the Civil Service Commission to enforce aggressively their existing policies banning employees guilty of "immoral conduct." The committee also called for a tightening of sex crime laws in the

District and for better communication among the agencies, the Civil Service Commission, and law enforcement officials.

Flanagan forwarded his draft of the report on to each committee member. Only Senators Mundt and Schoeppel sent back suggestions for revision, and these were minor. Both men asked Flanagan to add something about, as Mundt put it, the committee's intent to reexamine the situation periodically "to see whether these recommendations are being followed and whether they are comprehensive enough to protect the public interest": a warning to the agencies to be vigilant. Flanagan obliged. The impact of his wordsmithing in the form of this report, like the impact of James Thomas's industrious cross-referencing, serves as a reminder that congressional power is wielded by hired staff as well as elected representatives.

The Hoey committee report was widely promulgated and highly influential. It shaped government agency security manuals for years to come. It was sent abroad to U.S. embassies and to foreign intelligence agencies. The report carried the authority of Congress and so was taken as official proof that gay people did indeed threaten national security. The U.S. government and even foreign governments repeatedly quoted it to justify discrimination.

Most significantly, the 1950 congressional investigations and the Hoey committee's final report helped institutionalize discrimination by laying the groundwork for President Dwight D. Eisenhower's 1953 Executive Order #10450, "Security Requirements for Government Employment."

That order explicitly added sexuality to the criteria used to determine suitability for federal employment. With the stroke of a pen, the President effectively banned gay men and lesbians from all jobs in the U.S. government—the country's largest employer.

Even the private sector was no haven. Because Eisenhower's order stipulated that "consultants" to government agencies could be investigated for adherence to these security requirements, contractors and other employers, especially in metropolitan Washington, followed the government's lead and adopted discriminatory hiring and firing practices as well.

Congressional investigation, and the institutionalized exclusion that followed, created a sizable ripple effect. Historians estimate that somewhere between 5,000 and tens of thousands of gay workers lost their jobs during the Lavender Scare. Some faced continued unemployment or underemployment, exclusion from their professions, financial strain or even ruin, and considerable emotional distress. Suicide was not uncommon. Some of these tragedies we know about; others remain forever hidden because obituaries typically omitted the cause of death in such cases.

Many gay men and lesbians did not even bother to apply for federal employment, or jobs with government contractors, because they worried about possible detection. Others passed up opportunities for promotion, or otherwise scaled down their ambitions, for fear of attracting

greater scrutiny in more prominent positions. The total fallout in terms of ruined or truncated lives and wasted human potential is ultimately immeasurable.

Unlike the Red Scare, the Lavender Scare featured no public naming of names and no dramatic spectacles in which the accused testified. That relative anonymity saved lives; public exposure almost certainly would have led to more suicides.

Yet this feature of the scare also meant that gay men and women remained vague specters—not real people.

Moreover, that anonymity tends to skew perception of the scare even today by making it seem abstract. If you read only the Hoey committee's published generalities and statistics, it is easy to see those caught up in the purge as numbers on a page, rather than particular human beings. In the unpublished committee records, however, the individuals emerge just a bit—in passing references and fleeting anecdotes.

One man who lost his job had married, fathered a child, and tried his best to be exclusively heterosexual before slipping up ("We would never have caught this fellow except this one time"); another fired employee worried about his dependents ("He cares for sick parents and has now no source of income"); another "committed suicide by leaping from a bridge." These kinds of fragments—scattered in the committee's transcripts, memoranda, correspondence, and other unpublished records—suggest the fuller truth and tragedy.

The Past as Prologue

The story recounted here is prologue to another: official discrimination eventually inspired some gay federal workers to take action.

In 1957, the Army Map Service fired astronomer Franklin Kameny because he had been arrested in California a year earlier for consensual contact with another man. Unlike most in his predicament, Kameny fought back in a sustained way, eventually appealing his dismissal all the way to the Supreme Court.

When that appeal failed in 1961, Kameny co-founded the Mattachine Society of Washington, D.C., which battled anti-gay discrimination in general and the federal government's exclusionary policies in particular. Other fired gay workers filed suit as well. Eventually, after years of public demonstrations, ongoing organizational pressure, and numerous legal battles, the tide turned.

CASE NO.	
1	Subject is white, 23 yrs., resident of the District, clerk typist. Arrested on October 13, 1947, by Officer W. C. Mason, and charged with loitering. Elected to forfeit \$25.00. Civil Service notified.
2	Subject is white, 46 yrs., resident of the District, employed at Boling Field as a civilian employee. Observed loitering in the station. Arrested on October 19, 1947, and charged with loitering. Elected to forfeit \$25.00 at #3 Precinct. Civil Service notified. (Pvt. Wallott)
3	Subject is white, 32 yrs., resident of the District, Sgt. US Marine Corps. Observed performing act of perversion upon below listed subject on October 20, 1947, by Pvt. Lyons and Cpl. Mast. Subject turned over to Shore Patrol. Civil Service notified.
4	Subject is white, 18 yrs., S/2 USN, stationed at Naval Air Station, Anacostia, D.C. Observed engaged in act of perversion with above subject on October 20, 1947, by Pvt. Lyons and Cpl. Mast. Subject turned over to Shore patrol. Civil Service notified.
5	Subject is white, 37 yrs., resident of Arlington, Va. Approached a GIB man for an act of perversion. Photographed and charged with disorderly conduct on October 27, 1947, by Pvt. Beale. Elected to forfeit \$25.00. Civil Service notified.
6	Subject is white, 24 yrs., Sgt., U.S. Army. Observed with another man who was about to perform an act of perversion upon the soldier. Subject was turned over to an M.P. (Nov. 2, 1947, Pvt. Mansell) Civil Service notified.
7	Subject is white, 36 yrs., Valley Stream, Long Island, N.Y., public relations representative. Made proposition to Sgt. Place. Fingerprinted, photographed at Metropolitan Police and charged for disorderly conduct. Elected to forfeit \$25.00. Admits to perversion when drinking. (Pvt. Traband, November 4, 1947) Civil Service notified.
8	Subject is white, 24 yrs., resident of the District, CAF-2 Clerk. Made proposition to Sgt. Place. Admits to being bi-sexual, wanting man only for drinking. Subject fingerprinted and photographed at Metropolitan Police and charged with disorderly. Elected to forfeit \$25.00. Civil Service notified. (Pvt. Traband, November 5, 1947)

An excerpt from Pervert Records (Government Employees), submitted by the U.S. Park Police to the Hoey committee. Because the Civil Service was notified in each case, these men likely lost their jobs or were barred from government employment in the future. (Records of the U.S. Senate, RG 46)

In 1975 the Civil Service Commission announced new rules stipulating that gay people could no longer be barred or fired from federal employment because of their sexuality. The Lavender Scare was finally officially over (at least for civilian workers).

In his testimony before the Hoey committee in 1950, psychiatrist George Raines emphasized the danger of further alienating anyone who was already a social outcast. "That sort of individual," he warned, "is ripe for revolution."

He was correct. Although the "revolution" was of a different sort than Raines (or McCarthy) imagined, Kameny and his fellow activists, under the pressure of rising discrimination, brought about their own kind of revolution: a changed world for gay federal workers.

Author

Judith Adkins is an archivist at the Center for Legislative Archives at the National Archives in Washington, D.C.

Notes on Sources

The definitive monograph on the purge is David K. Johnson's *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government* (2004). I thank Dr. Johnson for sharing audio files of his interviews with Francis Flanagan in 1996 and 1997. For the background leading up to the investigations, and for the impact of the Hoey committee report, I have relied largely on Johnson's work and on Genny Beemyn's *A Queer Capital: A History of Gay Life in Washington, D.C.* (2015).

Other secondary works informing this account include: Randolph W. Baxter, "'Homo-Hunting' in the Early Cold War: Senator Kenneth Wherry and the Homophobic Side of McCarthyism," *Nebraska History* 84 (2003): 119–132; Douglas M. Charles, *Hoover's War on Gays: Exposing the FBI's "Sex Deviates" Program* (2015); Lillian Faderman, *The Gay Revolution: The Story of the Struggle* (2015); Linda Hirshman, *Victory: The Triumphant Gay Revolution* (2012); and Michael G. Long, *Gay is Good: The Life and Letters of Gay Rights Pioneer Franklin Kameny* (2014).

Primary sources used here include three congressional committee reports published by the U.S. Government Printing Office in 1950. The Wherry Report appeared as *Report of the Investigations of the Junior Senator of Nebraska . . . on the Infiltration of Subversives and Moral Perverts into the Executive Branch of the United States Government*, 81st Congress, 2nd Session, Senate Committee Print 4178. The Hill Report was published as *Report of the Subcommittee of the Subcommittee on the Appropriations for the District of Columbia . . . with Reference to Testimony on Subversive Activity and Homosexuals in the Government Service*, 81st Congress, 2nd Session,

Senate Committee Print 4179. The Hoey committee's final report is *Employment of Homosexuals and Other Sex Perverts in Government, Interim Report . . .*, 81st Congress, 2nd Session, Senate Document 241.

For McCarthy's speech to the Senate, see *Congressional Record*, 81st Congress, 2nd Session, Vol. 96, Part 2, pp. 1952–1981.

The unpublished records of the Hoey committee are part of National Archives Record Group 46, the Records of the U.S. Senate. The investigative files have been subsumed into the "numbered case files" of the investigating committee's successor committee, which is the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations (PSI) of the Senate Committee on Government Operations. These files are the Case 40 files of the PSI records. The committee's hearings transcripts are the Executive Session Hearings, Senate Committee on Expenditures in the Executive Departments, Subcommittee on Investigations, 81st Congress.

The specific hearings and Case 40 items referenced in this article are: Sawyer's July 24 letter is in file 40-09; Colvin's July 31 letter and Thomas's July 6 and July 20 memoranda are in file 40-20, folder 2; Hillenkoetter's testimony, and the senators' responses, are from the executive session of July 14; the Blick and Quinn testimonies are from the executive session of September 15; Fry's August 9 letter is in file 40-17; the Scheele and Raines testimonies are from the executive session of July 26; the Perkins and Ladd testimonies are from the executive session of September 8; the Hoey, Flanagan, and Ford correspondence regarding legislative employees is in file 40-0, folder 1; correspondence about the final report is in file 40-24.

Those "passing references and fleeting anecdotes" are from Hillenkoetter's July 14 testimony, Raines's July 26 testimony, and Thomas's June 20 memorandum in file 40-20, folder 1.

The interview of Ruth Young Watt was conducted by Donald A. Ritchie on September 7, 1979, for the Oral History Project of the United States Senate Historical Office. A transcript is available on that office's website.

Eisenhower's Executive Order #10450 can be found on the website of the Office of the Federal Register; the original is at the National Archives as part of Record Group 11, General Records of the U.S. Government.

Note on language: I have used *homosexual* or *gay* interchangeably to describe workers fired for homosexuality, but these are not necessarily terms they would have used to describe themselves. *Gay* as a descriptor for sexual orientation dates to the 1920s but did not become common usage until the 1970s.

Articles published in *Prologue* do not necessarily represent the views of NARA or of any other agency of the United States Government.

The U.S. National Archives and Records Administration

1-86-NARA-NARA or 1-866-272-6272

Top